

1:45-2:45 Wednesday: Your Thoughts Matter: Mental Health and Youth

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Session Description: Participants will learn about and identify innovative ways to include mental health conversations into their existing youth programming. According to the National Council on Behavioral Health, one in every five American youth has been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Extension has a long history of quality, research-based, youth programming, specifically in the areas of health and wellness; but the topic of mental health is often overlooked due to its taboo nature. The presenters are certified Youth Mental Health First Aid instructors who are working across disciplines to engage the entire Ohio State community in the mental health conversation. Attendees will learn mental health terminology and statistics while participating in hands-on activities, and will gain a better understanding of why open dialogue on brain health is vital to positive youth development.

Introduction Terminology/Stats – use the following activities to educate the group about how common mental health disorders are in the United States and familiarize them with common disorder definitions.

1. **Mental Health true or false activity** – introduction to statistics (attached)
2. **Definitions exercise- find your match** – introduction to types of disorders (attached)
 - a. Hand out the slips of paper and have those with a disorder try to find the person with the definition that matches
3. **Reflect:**
 - Which of these facts surprised you the most?
 - Based on these facts, what can you infer about the number of youth you interact with who may be dealing with a mental health disorder?
 - What types of mental health problems do you think we may encounter most in your work?
4. **Apply:**
 - Think about what you know about mental health and mental health disorders. How can you use the power of this information to benefit your clientele?
 - When at work, if you notice a coworker has a headache, you suggest they drink more water and get hydrated. This is just one way that you keep others' physical health in mind. What can you do at work to support coworkers' mental health?

Typical adolescence versus mental health problems – use the following activity to help the audience realize that the signs of an emerging mental health disorder look very similar to typical adolescent development.



Stress that when something impacts a youth's ability to live, laugh, and love for a period of 3 weeks or more, it is probably time to talk to their doctor about their mental health.

1. ABCs of Adolescent Development

- a. On a piece of flipchart paper write A-Z. Ask the group to shout out attributes of normal teenagers that start with each letter.
- b. Go back and circle answers that could also be a symptom or sign of a mental health problem or disorder.
- c. Debrief about how to recognize signs and symptoms vs. normal development
 - i. Brain development doesn't stop until mid-twenties
 - ii. Conversations are an important tool to knowing the difference

Starting the Conversation- Conversation is one of our most powerful tools for helping youth with both typical teen emotions and emerging mental health problems. Positive conversation and language will also help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. Use the following discussion points and activities to teach the group how to start the conversation with a youth.

2. Starting Conversation

- a. Ask the group – How would you start the conversation? How do you feel about starting a conversation about mental health and your concerns?
 - i. Treat it as an everyday item of conversation, if possible.
 - ii. Make sure they know you care about their happiness and well-being.
 - iii. Groups- keep general, 1 on 1 if you have a specific concern, but be aware of professional obligations and best practices.
 - iv. Be aware of social media.

3. Reversing the Stigma

- a. Think before you speak activity
 - i. On a flipchart list out phrases that we use regularly that may be hurtful to someone with a mental health diagnosis. (The weather is bipolar, I'm going crazy, I would rather kill myself...) Ask the group for suggestions
 - ii. Now have the group construct other things we could say instead that would be less hurtful and help reduce stigma.
- b. Person first language
 - i. Explain person first language and give examples
 1. He is a schizophrenic versus He lives with schizophrenia
 2. I am bipolar versus I live with bipolar disorder
 3. He is an all-star basketball player versus He has a lot of talent on the basketball court.
- c. Normalize the conversation by having it often, even if you aren't concerned.
- d. Be open with your youth and don't be afraid to share your personal feelings/observations/etc.

4. Q&A